



Duane Dassow, left, and Wade Louis discuss habitat opportunities for his property.

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Today's Habitat Team

By Wade Lewis, Division of Private Lands and Watersheds

You may know them as The Roadside Crew or you may have heard them called the Eco-Teams. It doesn't really matter by which name you know them; the evolution of today's Habitat Team still maintains many purposes of their past existence. Starting in 1972, as part of the Roadsides for Wildlife campaign, the Roadside Crew provided free seeding of roadsides for cooperators in east-central Illinois who agreed to delay mowing until after grassland bird nesting season. In the mid-nineties the Roadsides Crew was expanded to meet growing habitat needs on private land. Renamed the Eco-Team and opening three new satellite offices, they were charged to work with all ORC Divisions in accomplishing their respective missions.

In the early 2000's, an organizational change facilitated another renaming to our current moniker "The Habitat

Team" and placed in the Program Support Section, now the Division of Private lands and Watersheds.

Today, the Habitat Team Program provides technical assistance, seed, plants, equipment and labor to private landowners for wildlife habitat establishment and improvement. While our name may have changed our purposes have not as we still provide assistance to other areas within the Office of Resource Conservation, regularly working with Wildlife, Heritage and Fisheries divisions, and still administering the Roadsides for Wildlife campaign. Our work items and focus have slightly changed over the years but one thing has remained consistent; HABITAT! Through creation or maintenance our goal is to provide the best possible habitat for wildlife and outdoor recreation within Illinois.



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Next Week:
Watershed Protection Section

@ORC is a weekly publication by the IL Department of Natural Resources Office of Resource Conservation about exciting and wonderful things ORC staff are doing throughout Illinois.



Habitat establishment at Saybrook Habitat Area was completed utilizing IDNR's Habitat Team

Habitat Team Program yearly averages since 2008 include:

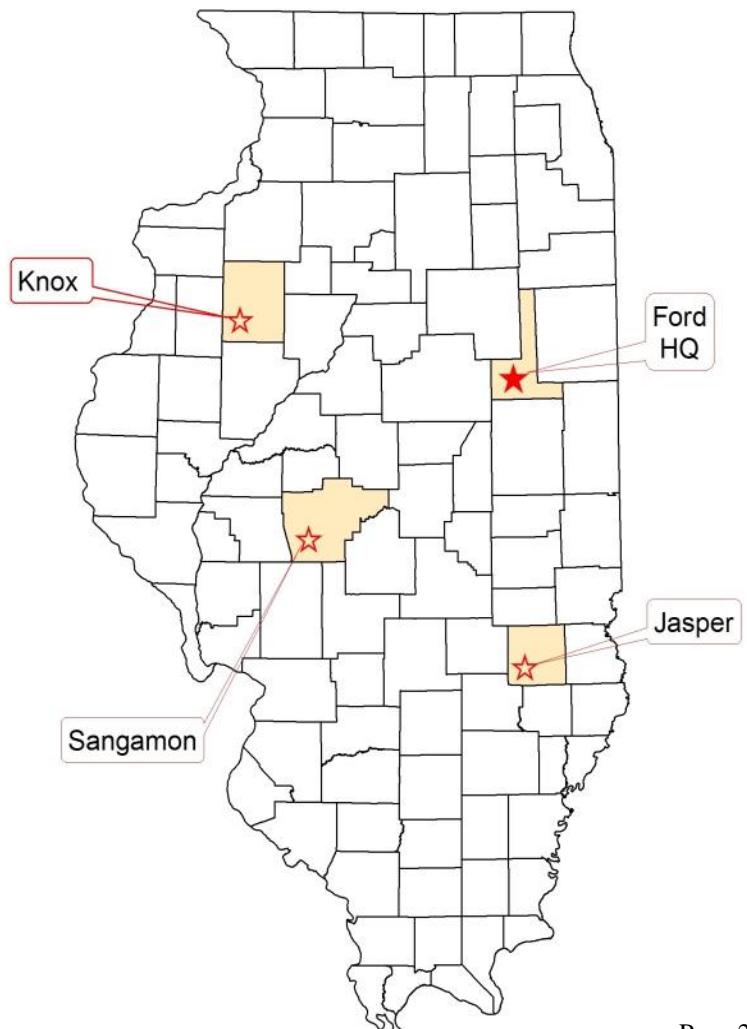
- establishing 1,089 grassland acres,
- performing prescribed burns on 560 acres,
- grassland maintenance (mowing, spraying) on 1,200 acres,
- exotic removal on 450 acres of woodland habitat, and
- assisting 85 different landowners.

The Habitat Team has also assisted other Divisions with habitat maintenance on department owned habitat areas; Kudzu eradication as part of the Kudzu Eradication Program; Barn Owl box construction and installment for the Barn Owl Recovery Plan; Prairie chicken transport box construction for Prairie Chicken recovery; and assisted in trapping feral pigs.



Barn Owl and nesting box

Habitat Team Locations



Project Highlight

Headquartered in Gibson City and having a strong grassland heritage, the Habitat Team is uniquely situated to handle large and small grassland conservation prospects. In 2007, they had the opportunity to enter into a multi-agency partnership to help establish one of the largest state owned grassland areas; the expansion of Saybrook Pheasant Habitat Area.

Originally purchased in 1992, the 86 acre Saybrook Pheasant Habitat Area (PHA), located in east-central McLean County, was purchased to provide winter and nesting cover for pheasants and increased recreational opportunities for pheasant hunters. In July of 2007, the State purchased 520 acres of traditional row crop farmland and 40 acres of existing grassland as an extension of the original Saybrook PHA. While the addition is significant in helping to meet many goals of the Farmland

Campaign as outlined in the Wildlife Action Plan there were meaningful concerns how to handle the significant implementation costs associated with such a large acreage.

Recognizing its ecological impact as one of the state's largest grassland complexes and to help ameliorate the large implementation costs the IDNR applied for and, in March of 2008, received a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) Grant through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). With funds for implantation secured, the Habitat Team was able to establish 520 acres of grassland habitat phased over a two year period.

Conservation today is dependent upon successful partnerships to help bridge manpower and financial gaps. The Saybrook PHA is an example of how multiple agencies and ORC Divisions can work together to achieve our conservation goals.

A diverse combination of 9 grasses and 24 forb species were used at Saybrook Habitat Area. Placement on the landscape was based on soil types and hydrology. Pre and post-habitat establishment point count surveys will help gauge avian grassland species response.

